

Recognizing Sentence Errors

If you find this part of the New SAT Writing section daunting; you are not alone. The truth is that most public high schools today spend little time on grammar. Perhaps you learned the basics of standard grammar in late elementary and in middle school and have had very little instruction or even review since then. Well, that's another good reason for you to read this book. In the following pages, we review those basic skills that you will be expected to have if you are taking the SAT Exam. Luckily, a great many of the Identifying Sentence Errors questions relate to a limited number of grammatical issues.

Standard American English is what U.S. colleges will expect you to know and use. Often it is not always the way in which many of us speak, but, like most things in life, there is a time and place for everything. This is the time and place for putting your slang and jargon aside and tackling this section as an educated student.

Note that we're talking about standard **American** English. This is not a cultural bias or anything. The only reason why American English is mentioned is in contrast to British English (often referred to as *The King's English*). British English differs somewhat from the language we speak here in the colonies, and for the SAT Exam, you are expected to be knowledgeable about American English.

Find the Error

Basically, what the SAT folks expect you to do with these questions is to identify the error in the sentence. This is an unusual challenge since most of your school life you have taken multiple-choice tests that expect you to choose the correct piece of information for your answer. Now you must choose the incorrect information as your answer. If you've not had to answer this type of question before, this might take you some time to get use to the format. With practice, however, you will learn to spot the error quickly.

You are offered a sentence with four underlined words or phrases. This sentence is followed by the words, **No error**, also underlined. Each of these underlined parts is lettered, A–E, corresponding to the A–E ovals on your answer grid sheet. The following is an example:

<p><u>Although</u> the student body <u>continue</u> to get smaller, the superintendent <u>insists that</u> the high school <u>is thriving</u>.</p> <p><u>No error.</u></p>
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You are to decide what (if anything) is wrong with this sentence and fill in the “bubble” in your answer booklet accordingly. Here are a couple suggestions that will help you identify the error:

- Listen to the sound of the sentence as you read it. The first couple times, don't be afraid to read it aloud. Eventually, you will have to work on developing an inner ear so you can “hear” the sentences in your head.
- Repeat the underlined sections, still listening for something wrong.
- If the answer is not obvious to you, use the process of elimination to choose your response. Remember, Choice E is just as valid as any of the other responses.

Try this with the preceding example. Even if you have a pretty good idea of what's wrong in this sentence, go through the steps here because you can be sure that not all of the questions will be as obvious to you as this one may be.

1. Read the sentence to yourself, aloud if you can.
2. Go over the underlined parts a couple times.
3. Not sure yet? Take each underlined section, one at a time, listening and looking for an error.

Let's go through this step by step:

1. *Although* seems to be an appropriate transition word here since the sentence demonstrates contrasting points.
2. Is *continue* the best verb form for the subject? What is the subject? After you find the verb, ask yourself "Who or what continue?" The answer is *student body* (singular—one entire body as a whole). *Continue* doesn't sound right, does it? If you're still not sure, substitute the singular pronoun "it" for the words "student body." Then you have "**It continue** to get smaller." That doesn't sound right, does it? "It" (student body) is considered singular, so you need the singular form of the verb, *continues*. Fortunately, the SAT Exam never asks you to correct a sentence; it only asks you to identify what might be wrong with the sentence.
3. Just to be sure that **B** "continue" is the right answer, go ahead and double check Choices **C** and **D**. "Superintendent *insists that*" is correct, and "school *is thriving*" is also okay. This should reassure you that **B** is the correct response.

Don't always expect an error (the correct answer) to be present in each of these questions. It is very likely that No error (Choice **E**) is the correct response. For those of you who are looking for the odds, you can expect that No error (Choice **E**) will be the correct answer just as much as any of the other answers. In fact, the chances for Choice **E** being the answer are about 20 percent. No one choice will more likely be the correct response than any of the other choices.

Common Grammar and Usage Errors

Grammar and usage—these are words that can strike fear into the hearts of even the most stalwart English student. Relax. The following section of this book is an overview/refresher of the most pertinent parts of grammar and usage that you will need for the Writing Section of the SAT Exam.

Subject-verb Agreement

Agreement is just that—two or more items or people in accord. That is what subject and verb agreement is about. The **number** of the subject (singular or plural) and the **number** of the verb (singular or plural) must agree. You can be sure that several of the Identifying Sentence Errors as well as Improving Sentences questions will deal with the agreement of subject and verb.

The *best* way to check this out is to look at the following example and then take it one step at a time:

Tess ate my slipper.

1. Find the verb, **ate**.
2. Ask "who or what" ate?
Your answer is the *subject* of the sentence: Who or what ate? **Tess** ate. Therefore, **Tess** is the subject of the sentence.
3. If for some wild reason you want to know the direct object of all this action, ask Subject (Tess) + verb (ate) who or what? And the answer is **slipper**, the direct object.

So there you have it: **Tess** is the subject; **ate** is the verb; and **slipper** is the direct object. By the way, Tess is a dog.

Sounds simple doesn't it? Well, believe it or not, sometimes the SAT Identifying Sentence Errors questions are just that simple. The following are some additional examples of what you may encounter on the Identifying Sentence Errors questions portion of the SAT Exam:

- A singular subject takes a singular verb.
- A *penny* saved *will* hardly *buy* you very much.
(penny = single subject will buy = singular verb)

- *Assault and battery is* a crime best avoided.
(Sometimes a single subject [ham and eggs, breaking and entering] may be made up of two parts.)
- *The Sound and the Fury is* a book by William Faulkner.
(Notice that the title seems plural, but it is the title of only one book, so it is a singular subject.)
- A plural subject takes a plural verb:
 - *Cobras are* not the best choice of pet for small children.
(cobras = plural subject are = plural verb)
 - *Sleepy and Grumpy were* unable to keep up with Snow White on her new jogging regimen.
(Sleepy and Grumpy = plural subject were = plural verb)
- Collective nouns such as jury and team may be singular or plural, whether they are intended to be taken as a whole group (singular) or as separate individuals (plural).
 - The *jury has made* its decision.
(The jury here is one singular body, so it takes the singular verb, *has made*.)
 - The *committee have been* unable to agree to any sort of consensus or compromise among themselves, so the item was tabled.
(In this case, each member of the committee is involved, so the subject is plural and takes the plural verb *have been*.)
- Indefinite pronouns (someone, everyone, nobody) are singular, and despite the many times you will hear them wrongly used, each takes a singular verb.
 - *Everyone must* put on *his* own shoulder pads before going to football practice.
(Think about it; each player will have his own pads, right?)
 - It's hard to believe that *nobody is* responsible for this broken window and the baseball lying amid broken glass on the living room floor.
(What this is saying is that no *single body* is responsible. Kind of hard to believe that story, isn't it?)
 - A very few indefinite pronouns can be *either* singular or plural. If you think about these, this exception will make sense: *all, any, more, most, none, some*. Don't let these bother you. If you are presented with any of them, the sense of the sentence will most likely indicate how they are to be used.
- The subject and verb are separated by an interruptive phrase or clause. This is a favorite on tests like this. Just remember to find the verb, ask who or what, and that will be your subject. Then, if there is a prepositional phrase, or any other phrase, between the two trying to confuse you, you won't fall for the trick.
 - The *box of apples is* on the table.
(*Is* is the verb; "who or what is?" *box is*, which makes box the subject.)
 - Too many cooks in the kitchen spoil the pizza.
(*Cooks* (plural) is the subject, so this sentence needs the plural verb *spoil*.)

Practice Questions

1. The strangely distorted_A colorful pictures by Picasso has received_B much attention not only_C from the critics, but also from_D the general public. No error._E
2. The Student Council came_A to verbal blows in disagreement_B over the choice of theme_C for the winter dance that_D would be held the next month. No error._E

3. Everyone_A who_B plans to attend_C the senior retreat need_D to pack appropriate camping supplies. No error._E
4. A classic such as_A *Cinderella*, or other similar_B fairy tales, becomes_C distorted from its original, and sometimes less than positive_D, story when Disney rewrites the tale for public consumption. No error._E

Answers and Explanations

1. **B.** The subject of the first sentence is *pictures*, which is plural, so the plural form of the verb should be ***have received***.
2. **E.** Did you choose no change for this sentence? Good. In this case, the Student Council is not being thought of as one single whole, but a group of several individuals. Therefore, the plural form of the verb, *came*, is correct. In other words, *they* *came to verbal blows*.
3. **D.** At first this sentence might sound correct as it is. However, find the verb, *need*. Then ask yourself, who or what need? The answer is *Everyone need*. Everyone is one of those indefinite pronouns that must be taken as singular. *Every single one* *needs* is the combination you want.
4. **C.** Finally, *Cinderella* is one story. The interruptive phrase, *or other similar fairy tales*, might tempt you to choose the wrong answer. The subject is singular, the classic *Cinderella*, therefore, the verb must also be singular, *become*, not *becomes*. Choice **C** is the incorrect part of the sentence.

How did you do with subject-verb agreement? This is just one of several things that the Sentence Correction questions might present to you for correction. Let's look at other common grammar and usage errors with which you will be faced.

Verbs

Every verb has four principal forms: the present, present participle, past, and past participle.

<i>Present</i>	<i>Present Participle</i>	<i>Past</i>	<i>Past Participle</i>
walk	walking	walked	walked
eat	eating	ate	eaten

Use the present when you are talking about something in the present or future:

I walk. OR I will walk.

Use the present participle to form progressive tenses:

I am walking. OR I was walking.

Use the past when you are talking about what has happened in the simple past:

I walked.

Use the past participle to form the perfect tenses:

I have walked. (present) OR I had walked. (past) OR I will have walked. (future)

It's really not that important that you know all of these different tenses just to name them. Luckily, most of our verbs are regular verbs, such as walk (walk, walking, walked, walked). However, some are irregular, such as eat, and these verbs have different forms. You need to become familiar with these irregular verbs. Here are some of the most common irregular verbs and their parts:

<i>Present</i>	<i>Past Tense</i>	<i>Past Participle</i>
arise	arose	arisen
bear	bore	born or borne
bite	bit	bitten
bring	brought	brought
burst	burst	burst
catch	caught	caught
come	came	come
creep	crept	crept
dive	dive or dove	dived
do	did	done
draw	drew	drawn
fall	fell	fallen
fight	fought	fought
fly	flew	flown
forgive	forgave	forgiven
freeze	froze	frozen
give	gave	given
grow	grew	grown
hang	hung	hung
hang (execute)	hanged	hanged
hide	hid	hidden
know	knew	known
lay (put or place)	laid	laid
lie (horizontal)	lay	lain
lie (falsehood)	lied	lied
prove	proved	proved or proven
ring	rang	rung
rise	rose	risen
shake	shook	shaken
see	saw	seen
shake	shook	shaken
show	showed	showed or shown
shrink	shrank	shrunk

(continued)

Continued

Present	Past Tense	Past Participle
sink	sank	sunk
steal	stole	stolen
swim	swam	swum
take	took	taken
tear	tore	torn
wake	woke or waked	woken or waked
wear	wore	worn
write	wrote	written

Verb Tense Problems

It is not unusual in the Identifying Sentence Errors section of the SAT Writing Exam as well as the Improving Sentences section to find an error in the verb tense sequence. The following are examples that indicate appropriate verb sequences:

An unusual number of entertainers *turn* professional at an early age because of difficult childhoods *experienced* in their early years.

They *turn* professional now (generic present) due to unfortunate childhoods *experienced* in their pasts.

I *had talked* to Abraham before I *conferred* with Monica about the intended plans.

Again, this shows an appropriate sequence. *Had talked* precedes the sequence of *conferred*.

Whether or not Abdul *knows* the specific requirements of the scholarship, he will *be expected* to fill out the application form.

Knows indicates present tense, while the student will *be expected* to do something in the (near) future.

Now let's look at some **inappropriate** verb sequences. Can you see the problems?

Whenever we went out to eat, my mother always makes a fuss about whatever she orders.

In order to make the verb tenses the same, the sentence should read: "Whenever we *went* out to eat, my mother always *made* a fuss about whatever she *ordered*." Notice how the verbs have changed. All are now in the past tense.

Sarah attended Crockett School of Business, which was in San Antonio, Texas.

Unless the college has moved, it is most likely still in San Antonio, making a present tense verb more logical.. Therefore, the sentence should be corrected as

Sarah attended Crockett School of Business, which is in San Antonio, Texas.

Practice Questions

1. Before I went to the Mall of America, I had laid^A down to take a nap, knowing that^B I would need a lot of^C energy to cover all the stores I wanted to, shopping for^D a prom dress. No error.^E

2. When you are^A training a new puppy, one of the first commands that^B you want her to learn is to lay down^C when you give the command^D, “down!” No error^E.
3. It is questionable whether^A or not Shakespeare had wrote^B his own plays or not; many think^C that Francis Bacon may have been^D the writer. No error^E.

Answers and Explanations

1. **A.** The first sentence is checking to see whether you know the unusual past participle for lie (rest/recline). Although you won’t hear many people use the word (have/had) *lain*, that is the correct past participle form of this verb.
2. **C.** The second sentence is checking to see whether you have the lie/lay verbs straight in your mind. Since you want the dog to rest or recline, then he or she needs to *lie down*.
3. **B.** The third sentence, the correct form should be *had written*. The verb forms are *write*, *wrote*, (*have/had*) *written*.

Idiomatic Expressions: Choosing the Correct Preposition after Certain Verbs

Another type of error that the SAT Identifying Sentence Errors questions section might test your knowledge of is the recognition of particular prepositions that combine idiomatically with certain verbs. American English has many of these constructions. If you have taken a foreign language, you probably have run across idioms in those languages—phrases and word combinations that have a particular meaning, but don’t always translate very well into another language. For example,

Certain rap music is *frowned at* by many parents because of its objectionable lyrics.

The music is frowned upon, **not** frowned at. You can frown at a person.

The following is a list of many of these idiomatic verb-preposition combinations:

- **Accompanied by** a person; **accompanied with** something.
Cheryl was *accompanied by* Larry at the dance, and he gave her a corsage *accompanied with* a diamond ring.
- **Agree on** and **agree to** have to do with plans or ideas; **agree with** a person.
I *agreed on* the proposal I was offered and *agreed to* the terms. I shook hands with Mr. Ignatius and *agreed with* him that I should begin work as soon as possible.
- **Angry about** or **at** a thing; **angry with** a person.
I was *angry about* the long hours I was working and *angry at* all the social life I was missing. I should have been *angry with* my boss for expecting me to put in so many long hours.
- **Argue about** or **for** an issue; **argue with** a person.
The Student Council *argued with* the principal; they *argued about* the ban against open lunch.
- **Charged for** has to do with objects; **charged with** has to do with people.
To avoid being *charged* \$1200 *for* a laptop computer, the young man stole it; soon, however, he was *charged with* theft, put in jail, and made to pay restitution.
- **Concerned with** a problem; **concerned for** a person.
Concerned with the deteriorating situation of stray pets, Irma was *concerned for* the poor animals that were abused and abandoned.

- **Concur in** has to do with an idea or concept; **concur with** a person.

I *concur in* the decision to hire the new graduate to our firm. It was not difficult to *concur with* my fellow workers in this decision.

- **Escape from** means to get out of a bad situation. **Escape to** means to get out of one place and into another.

Salma was glad to *escape from* the class discussion when she was called to the attendance office.

When Hai Dam was little, he would *escape to* an imaginary world to avoid facing the real life around him.

- **Wait for** means standing around and being bored while a friend takes her time joining you. **Wait with** concerns one person's accompanying another. **Wait on** generally has to do with service.

We will *wait for* you in the lobby of the Orpheum Theatre before the play.

Sandi decided to *wait with* Eli while the results of his tests came back.

The clerk was tired of *waiting on* the recalcitrant customer.

The term **idiom** also refers to certain expressions and word combinations in a language. Sometimes these may vary somewhat among different regions of the country. Nevertheless, idiomatic expressions mean something to the immediate audience who hears them. Sometimes they can be very colloquial. These expression idioms are those such as “to lose one’s head,” “to give someone a hand,” “to high five someone,” “to make off with the loot,” “to be as hungry as a horse (or bear),” “to laugh until your sides split,” and so on. However, the idiomatic expression you will most likely encounter on the SAT Identifying Sentence Errors questions will be those that have to do with verb-preposition combinations.

Misused and Confused

Another challenge the SAT Identifying Sentence Errors questions might also include is those words that are often misused, abused, and confused by the best of us. In the haste of the moment, these misused words can easily be confused.

Here are some commonly confused or misused words. This is hardly a comprehensive list, but it does cover some of the main confusions students have in their writing. Be on the lookout for these in the multiple-choice questions of the *Writing Section* of the SAT Exam.

- **Accept/Except:** **Accept** is a verb meaning to agree to. **Except** is a preposition indicating exclusion.

The defendant had to *accept* the decision of the jury until an appeal could be made.

All the students were invited to the party *except* Carla and Sean.

- **Affect/Effect:** **Affect** is the verb; **effect** is the noun.

Paula’s misbehavior *affected* the behavior of the rest of the class.

Paula’s misbehavior had a big *effect* on the behavior of the other students.

- **Among/Between:** **Among** has to do with three or more, and **between** has to do with only two.

Among all the children, only Tricia had done her homework and knew the answer to the question.

Between you and me, the rest of this group is not worth hanging around with.

- **Amount of/Number of:** **Amount** has to do with a bulk quantity and cannot be counted. **Number** refers to things that can be counted.

We received a record-breaking *amount of* snow during the month of January.

The number of students who signed up for community service projects was impressive.

- **Because/That:** To say “*the reason is because*. . .” is considered redundant in standard English; use the word **that** instead. Instead of “The reason I did not get my homework done is because I had a game last night,” rewrite it as:

The reason I did not get my homework done *is that* I had a game last night.

I did not get my homework done *because* I had a game last night.

- **Disinterested/Uninterested:** The two words mean different things, and the distinction is valuable to know. To be **disinterested** is to be impartial. If you are disinterested, you are interested, but your emotions are not involved. If you take no interest, you are **uninterested**.

Salva was a *disinterested* witness; she had no connection with anything that happened.

On the other hand, Salma was *uninterested* and had no intention of becoming involved at all.

- **Fewer/Less:** Use **fewer** with things that can be counted; use **less** with things that cannot be counted.

There are *fewer* women attending veterinary school this year than there were last year.

This Web site provides far *less* information than what this book offers.

- **Irregardless:** Bottom line—there is NO such word in our language.
- **It's/Its:** This is a troubling twosome. **It's** is a contraction meaning *it is*. **Its** denotes the possessive pronoun.

It's (it is) time to give the dog *its (possessive)* dinner.

- **Passed/Past:** **Passed** is a verb. **Past** can be a noun meaning long ago, a preposition meaning by or beyond; or an adjective meaning *former*.

Matthew *passed* all his classes this semester.

Drew recalls an incident from his *past* (n) when he ran home and went *past* (preposition) the school that he had attended in his *past* (adj) life.

- **Principal/Principle:** **Principal** can be a *noun* as in a person who is in charge of a school or an *adjective* that means the main one. A **principle** is an ideal or standard.

Mister Schoen, the *principal* (n), laid down some *principles* (n) for the Student Council to follow. The *principal* (adj) guideline was that each member was to be an academic and social role model for other students.

- **Regardless/Irregardless:** Just remember one thing—there is NO such word as **irregardless**.

We plan to have the family reunion at the picnic site *regardless* of the weather that day.

- **Their/There/They're:** **Their** is a possessive pronoun showing ownership. **There** is an *adverb* that indicates place or location. **They're** is a *contraction* for two words, *they are*.

The students know *they're (they are)* supposed to put *their (possessive)* books over *there (location)* on the shelf before entering the testing room.

- **Who's/Whose:** **Who's** is a contraction for *who is*. **Whose** is a possessive pronoun showing ownership.

Who's (who is) planning on going to the mall with me?

Whose (ownership) book is this lying on the floor?

- **Your/You're:** **Your** is a *possessive pronoun* indicating ownership. **You're** is a contraction for *you are*.

You're (you are) entirely responsible for the consequences of *your (ownership)* actions.

Perplexing and Provoking Pronouns

Next to verbs, many of the Identifying Sentence Errors questions have to do with pronouns (words that take the place of nouns). No doubt that pronouns are bothersome parts of speech, but you need to refresh your memory on some of the rules that surround them.

Pronoun Shift

For many of you, this has happened often in your writing. You will be talking about this mythical his/her person, and suddenly you shift in your writing to the pronoun *you*. This is not uncommon, and if this is one of your guilty secrets, there is no need to chastise yourself too much. This is the way in which most people speak. However, on the SAT Writing test, be careful that you are not guilty of this error. For instance,

The *reader* needs to be aware of all the nuances of Nathaniel Hawthorne's symbolism in *The Scarlet Letter*. For instance, *you* will soon realize that the child Pearl is the physical representation of the symbolic letter "A" on Hester's chest.

The *reader* is third person singular, he or she. The next sentence shifts to “you,” which is a second person pronoun. Either *reader* must be changed to *you*, or the pronoun *you* in the second sentence should be changed to *he/she*. Pronouns must remain consistent.

These are things you need to remember when you write your essay, when you tackle Sentence Correction questions, as well as when you answer the Sentence Improvement questions.

	<i>Singular pronouns</i>	<i>Plural pronouns</i>
1st Person	I	WE
2nd Person	YOU	YOU
3rd Person	HE, SHE, IT	THEY

Regional idiosyncrasies sometimes ignore the rules of pronouns. For the SAT Exam, however, you must be aware of appropriate American English when you choose the answer.

Pronoun Number

Number refers to a pronoun as being singular or plural. Remember a pronoun is used in place of or to make reference to a noun. Therefore, if the noun is singular, the pronoun used to reference it must be singular. If the noun is plural, then the pronoun must be plural in number. For instance:

After the *child* (singular) fell off his bicycle, *he* (singular) cried because he skinned his knees and hands.

The *dogs* (plural) were so distracted by the squirrel *they* (plural) would not stop barking.

Compound Pronoun Structures

Be alert if you see a pronoun used as part of a compound (two or more parts) structure. Following are some examples:

- The other players and *I* (not *me*) were both glad and sad that our season was finally over.
- *She* (not *Her*) and her parents decided to take a trip to the Holy Land.
- *He* (not *him*) and Orlando stopped by Jiffy Burger after the basketball game. (He stopped and Orlando stopped, you wouldn't say Him stopped, would you?)

Adjectives and Adverbs

Adjectives are modifiers or describers. They give us details about the noun or pronoun to which they are attached. For instance they tell us:

- | | | |
|--------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| ■ How many? | <i>ten</i> days being grounded | <i>several</i> hours of homework |
| ■ How much? | <i>more</i> rain expected today | <i>little</i> chance of sunshine |
| ■ What kind? | a <i>purple</i> cow | with a <i>gold nose</i> ring |
| ■ Which one? | <i>my sixteenth</i> birthday | <i>those</i> kittens are for sale |

Adverbs modify **verbs** most of the time. They can also modify adjectives and other adverbs.

Modifying Verbs

She swam *swiftly* to the wall and *deftly* made her turn and started back.

Swiftly tells us how she swam; *deftly* tells us how well she turned. *Hint*: Most adverbs that modify verbs end in -ly.

Adverbs modifying verbs help to tell us **when** something happened (left early); **where** it might have happened (moved up); **how** it happened (danced divinely); or to **what** extent (almost finished).

Modifying Adjectives

For a skinny girl, Sally had an *unbelievably* large appetite.

Large is the adjective modifying appetite; *unbelievably* tells us how large.

Modifying Adverbs

The soprano sang *so* sweetly the audience was moved to tears.

Sweetly is the adverb, *so* is another adverb modifying sweetly. Although not incorrect, overuse of double adverbs is not advised.

Faulty Comparisons

Comparisons are either *regular*—big, better, and biggest—these regular comparisons are identifiable by the -er and -est endings—or *irregular*—worse, worse, and worst—the irregular comparisons do not have common, identifiable endings. They are formed by changing the words. For example

One thing is **good**. One thing compared to another (two items) is **better**. One out of two or more is **best**.

Double Negatives

Not all double negatives are as obvious as “I *don’t* have *no* money.” Several other words such as hardly, barely, and scarcely are also negatives. Be careful you don’t get fooled by these less obvious negatives. For example,

Among this year’s National Honor Society inductees, *barely no one* has been able to maintain the required 3.6 grade point average.

In order to make a correct negative statement, the sentence should just read “no one has been able. . .” *Barely* needs to be eliminated because it creates a double negative.

Punctuation Patterns

When you are writing, punctuation is somewhat intuitive. It is not a major part of the SAT Writing section, but you need to review some of the basics for the essay you write, for the Identifying Sentence Errors questions and for the Improving Sentence questions. The following is a review of the basics.

Coordination

An **independent clause** has a subject and a verb and presents a complete thought. These can be presented in three ways:

Two separate sentences—Sam was angry. Laura was late.

Two independent clauses connected with a semi-colon—Sam was angry; Laura was late.

Two independent clauses connected with a comma and a **coordinate conjunction**—Sam was angry, but Laura was late.

There are only seven coordinate conjunctions that can combine two independent clauses. Without a comma before the coordinate conjunction, or without other proper punctuation such as using the semi-colon instead of the coordinate

conjunction, the sentence becomes a run-on, and then it has faulty coordination. Following are the seven coordinate conjunctions:

but
or
yet
for
and
nor
so

You can remember these conjunctions by remembering the phrase **BOY FANS**, which is created by using the initial letter of each conjunction.

Let's look again at Sam and Laura:

- Sam was angry. Laura was late.
- Sam was angry; Laura was late.
- Sam was angry, but (yet, for, and, so) Laura was late.

Subordination

A **dependent clause** usually has a subject and a verb but does *not* present a complete thought. When they are used alone, dependent clauses are incomplete—that is, they are *sentence fragments*. Dependent clauses are introduced by subordinate conjunctions. *If the wrong subordinate conjunction is used or the sentence is improperly punctuated, then the sentence is guilty of faulty subordination.* The following is a list of many of the subordinate conjunctions:

after	if	unless	wherever
although	in order that	until	whether
as	once	what	, which
as if	provided that	whatever	while
as long as	since	when	who
before	so that	whenever	whom
during	that	where	whose
how	though	whereas	why

If the dependent clause appears first in a sentence, it is followed by a comma. If the dependent clause appears last in a sentence, there is no need for a comma except when the subordinate conjunction is the word “which.”

- Because Laura was late, Sam was angry
- Laura was late because Sam was angry.
- Laura was late, which was the reason Sam was angry.

Essential and Nonessential Information

Although this may seem like a minor aspect of punctuation, proper comma placement of essential and unessential information can be tricky. The mantra to remember is no commas (essential) or two commas (nonessential). If information is essential to the meaning of the sentence, it means that it lends clarity and understanding to the sentence. If information is nonessential, it can be removed, and you have not lost any crucial information in making the sentence clear.

If interrupting information is *essential*, then it **is not** set off by commas.

The teacher who really likes me is the one who gave me an A.

The clause, “who really likes me” is essential in that it clarifies a possible reason for the A being given.

If interrupting information is *nonessential*, then it **is** set off by commas.

The flowers, which I chose to plant in my garden, which my grandma used to like, were early summer peonies.

Although remembering grandma is a nice sentiment, it is not relative to the fact that this person has chosen an early summer peony to plant in the garden. The part about grandma, albeit interesting, is not essential. Therefore, it is set off by commas. Some folks who relate to visualization say that if a part of a sentence is nonessential, you can pick it up by the commas on each side of it and take it out. The important information of the sentence will remain.

The important thing to remember is that if you have interruptive information that is essential, do not use any commas. If the information just adds to the sentence, but is not absolutely necessary to getting the point of the sentence across, then it is nonessential and it takes a comma on each side of it.

Practice Questions

1. Franz, Lara’s long-lost brother, was wanting to be invited to the party, but he was, unfortunately, not invited.
A B C D
No error.
E
2. Carlos did not want to go to the Frost Daze Dance, nevertheless, his friends convinced him to attend the once-in-a-lifetime event, and he also knew his grandmamma wanted him to socialize more. No error.
A B C D E
3. Although many children had swum often in the local swimming hole, the adults in the community was very concerned about the imminent dangers the location held for children who ignored the local warnings. No error.
A B C D E
4. Because of all the homework Yer had to do for her AP classes, as well as her extra-curricular activities, she couldn’t hardly find time to sleep. No error.
A B C D E
5. Whenever we went to the mall, my friends and I always visit The Gap, our favorite store. No error.
A B C D E
6. The *Grapes of Wrath* are one of my favorite books, but I preferred the original black-and-white movie when I saw it a couple years ago. No error.
A B C D E
7. I wrote my term paper on the legalization of growing marijuana because, after doing much research, I found that marijuana will have many benefits to society apart from its use as a drug. No error.
A B C D E
8. It’s impossible to know whose going on the fieldtrip to the Art Institute until the students actually bring in their money. No error.
A B C D E

9. I realize that I must prepare for the SAT Exam, so I will be accepted by the college of my choice. No error.
A B C D E
10. Ashar is a student who recognizes that theres a time to buckle down and study, and there's time to have fun with her friends. No error.
A B C D E
11. Bravery, the trait mainly Harry shows, which plays a big role in his life, is the focus of most of his multitudinous adventures. No error.
A B C D E
12. Sam was so angry at his job situation that not one of his friends wanted to be near him; in addition, Laura, who hated conflict, decided not to go out with him that evening. No error.
A B C D E
13. Young readers associate to the character, Harry Potter, because they, whom this series actually targets, can relate to the hero in so many ways; he is basically kind, courageous, honest, and altruistic towards others. No error.
A B C D E
14. The principal of the high school, who was only in his second year, was dismayed by the number of students who had not past the basic standards exam because these results were giving the school its negative reputation. No error.
A B C D E
15. Walt Disney Studios have successfully been making movies for children and general audiences for many decades. No error.
A B C D E
16. Dr. Martini was accompanied with an intern who is specializing in orthopedic surgery at the university medical school, which was featured in the news recently. No error.
A B C D E
17. The master teacher was such a success in the classroom that he was always surrounded by admiring students from the university. No error.
A B C D E
18. Since there wasn't much chance of rain on the day planned for the picnic, Paula reserved the picnic shelter just in case. No error.
A B C D E
19. Yesterday was my friend's birthday, so I decided to surprise her with a bouquet of early spring flowers that I planted and had nurtured in my own garden. No error.
A B C D E
20. The junior league on the field wondered about the grown up's odd, noisy behavior during their critical, championship game. No error.
A B C D E

Answers and Explanations

1. A. The verb was wanting should have been wanted, making Choice A the correct response.
2. E. This sentence has no errors, making Choice E the correct response.
3. C. This sentence has a subject-verb agreement problem. The subject is adults, so was is the incorrect verb. It should be *were*.
4. D. This sentence has a double negative, “couldn’t hardly.” It should read *could* hardly.
5. A. This sentence has a verb agreement problem. Went is past tense, but the verb “visit” establishes the need for present tense.
6. A. This demonstrates subject-verb disagreement. *The Grapes of Wrath* is singular, although the word *Grapes* is plural; it is part of the title of a single book, so the verb are should be *is*.
7. C. The future tense will have should be the present tense *has*.
8. B. Whose is possessive. What this sentence needs is *who’s*, meaning who is (going on the fieldtrip. . .).
9. E. This sentence has no errors, making Choice E the correct response.
10. B. Do not expect many easy questions like this one. Hopefully you figured it out. Since theres and there’s are both underlined, it was a clue that one or the other of these has to be the correct response. You have a 50-50 chance on this one.
11. A. In this sentence, the adverb *mainly is in the wrong place*. *It is not mainly Harry but mainly shows, so it ought to be placed just before the verb shows*.
12. C. The first part of this sentence is really the cause of the second part of the sentence. Sam was angry and as a consequence, neither his friends nor Laura wanted to be with him. The phrase “in addition” should be replaced with the “consequently” or “as a result.”
13. A. Associate is one of those verbs that combined with various prepositions, has several idioms. The correct combination for this sentence would be the young readers *associate with* Harry Potter.
14. C. On a quick read you may miss this one if you are relying on just your ear. The word *past*, Choice C, is actually a preposition or adjective. In this sentence what should be there is the past tense verb, *passed*.
15. A. Walt Disney Studios, although it sounds plural, is a single conglomerate business, therefore this subject requires the singular form of the verb, *has*.
16. A. The idiom *accompanied with* is incorrect in this case. It should read *accompanied by*.
17. E. The idiom *surrounded by* is the correct one in this sentence; therefore, the sentence has no errors.
18. E. This sentence has no errors.
19. D. This sentence needs a compound verb. *Had nurtured* cannot follow *planted*, since one plants before one nurtures. Therefore, the sentence would be better if it said *I planted and nurtured*.
20. B. More than one grown up is acting childishly in this sentence. Therefore, the proper possessive would be *grown ups’ odd, noisy behavior*.